

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Usaku Morihara, 96, retired coffee dealer and storekeeper

"I told [American] Factors to reduce all of the debts. . . . I told them the coffee business would be doomed otherwise, and there would be no farmers in Kona, so it would be their loss as well as ours. I told them let us be free of our debts. . . ."

Usaku Morihara, the fourth of five children, was born on November 25, 1884, in Yamaguchi-ken, Japan. As a youth, he attended school for six years and worked on the family farm. He married at the age of 19. Shortly after his marriage, he fought in the Russo-Japanese War. In 1905, he resumed farming but soon became dissatisfied.

Usaku left Japan for Kona in 1907. At the end of his first five years as a cook in Kona, he rejoined his wife in Japan only to return two years later. He worked as a cook at Huehue Ranch for three years and tried coffee farming, albeit unsuccessfully.

In ca. 1919, Usaku ventured into the buying and selling of coffee, invested in stocks, and opened the Morihara Store in Honaunau, Kona. During the mid-1920s, he founded Sun Mellow Coffee Mill which ceased operations in 1942, when he was interned on the Mainland for three years.

After World War II, Usaku restocked his store and continued playing the stock market. Twice decorated by the Japanese government for his accomplishments and service to the Kona community, Usaku is remembered for his role in the 1930s movement for debt adjustment.

Today, Usaku is a retiree but regularly helps at the family store.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Usaku Morihara (UM)
November 6, 1980
Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii
BY: Michiko Kodama (MK)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Mako Mantzel.]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Usaku Morihara in Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii on November 6, 1980. Morihara-san, when were you born?

UM: November 25, 1884.

MK: Where were you born?

UM: Yamaguchi-ken, Yanai-shi, Bahara, is where I was born.

MK: When you were growing up, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

UM: Ten.

MK: What number were you among the ten?

UM: I was the fourth boy.

MK: How many boys were there?

UM: Six boys.

MK: The other four were girls?

UM: Yes.

MK: What kind of jobs did your mother and father do when you were young?

UM: Farmers. We were all working in the fields. My parents were farmers.

MK: What sort of things did they grow?

UM: You mean the job?

MK: Yes.

UM: Growing rice.

MK: How many tsubo [3.954 square yards] did they own? I mean the land.

UM: The land, uh, when I was growing up, well, it was two chō [2.45 acres], which is five acres.

MK: How about the neighbors? What were they doing?

UM: They were all farmers, too.

MK: When you think back, what was the village like?

UM: It was a nice village.

MK: How many families were there in the village? And how many people were there?

UM: In the village? This Yanai was a big village. Uh, I don't know what the population was then, but probably 4000 to 5000.

MK: What sort of house was it that you grew up in?

UM: You mean the household I was born in? Well, let's see. Since my parents were farmers all along, and my father had a construction business going also, they bought mountain land and cut the trees and then sold them as fuel in the city of Yanai. As family members, we all used to help. So there were all types of work to do.

MK: What sort of house was it that you were living in then?

UM: Uh, an ordinary one. I have a picture of the house. I'll show it to you bumbai, yeah.

MK: Can you describe it?

UM: Well, what sort of house? Uh, it's difficult to describe it. Uh, nothing special, just an ordinary house.

MK: Then, in a Japanese family like yours, what kind of food did you use to eat every day?

UM: The main dish was rice. Most Japanese used to eat rice and wheat. Other things, we didn't eat much of.

MK: How about okazu [side dish]? What sort of food did you eat with the rice?

UM: Okazu? We ate vegetables and so forth, but we didn't eat much meat, but we ate a lot of fish. When we were growing up, the farmers in Japan had cattle, so they used to say, "We are not supposed to eat meat," since those cattle were considered treasures.

Japanese farmers didn't eat meat because they used cattle to cultivate their fields. They were the source of energy. The farmers depended on them. Even though nowadays it's all done by machines. A lot of machines have been developed for agricultural purposes. But when I was growing up, there weren't any machines. The only energy source was cattle and horses. So farmers wouldn't eat cow or horse meat. They wouldn't invite people who ate meat into their houses. It was the way they felt, their thought, although it wasn't a rule; they couldn't eat it, so they didn't eat it. The cattle were part of the family and eating them was like eating their own children. That's why they didn't eat meat.

Instead, we all ate fish. Since Japan is surrounded by four seas, we could catch as many fish as we wanted. And shellfish, there were plenty then, but not so much nowadays. When I was young, I used to go to a beach and dig in the sand and find lots of shellfish.

Then the population was small, the Japanese population then must have been 30 million. It's 120 million now, but back then, between 30 and 40 million. At the time of the Russo-Japanese War, it was about 40 million, and at the time of the Sino-Japanese War, it was less than 30 million. So we had plenty of fish. Since Japan is surrounded by ocean on four sides, fish were abundant, very easy to get, and cheap.

MK: So it was rice and fish

UM: Rice and fish. And we grew vegetables ourselves.

MK: When you think of your parents and your family, and the neighbors then, how did you consider yourselves economically, compared to the neighbors, high or low?

UM: The same, not much difference. Anyway, Japanese people were family-oriented, although nowadays kids leave their parents' home. Like when a son gets married, he leaves his parents' home since the bride feels uncomfortable living with her husband's parents. But in the old days in Japan, when I was there, there was a family with three couples living together, and there wasn't a fight. We were family-oriented when we were growing up in Japan then. Although we had lots of people living in the same house, we didn't fight, and we helped each other, though nowadays people have become more individualistic.

I like the old lifestyle better than the recent one. Nowadays, if a father has lots of money, kids want the money as soon as possible. But in the old days, we couldn't get it unless the father died. It

was received when the father died, and it was the firstborn son who received it; the rest didn't have the right to inherit the father's estate. When it was given, a trustee was named and he divided the estate, but it was not much, so the rest [all except the first son] left home to work when they were old enough and built their own homes elsewhere. But up to a certain point we lived together in a single household with our parents since we considered the family valuable. This is Japanese tradition.

It is said, "Kyō no itoko ni tonari wa kaeren." Your neighbor is more helpful than the cousin in Kyoto. If you had your brother in Tokyo or America, when you got sick they wouldn't worry about you, but your neighbor would. Your neighbors are like your own family. We took care of each other in difficult times or when illness occurred. It's our Japanese tradition to help each other, since the old days. If I said this now, people would say, "Old foolish people." But I like the old way.

We did not think about money then as much as people do now. My family name, and my family, were important. And if I had a fight with my parents and left home, it would be hirahira, a shame. So no matter what happened, we tried to stick together, even if there was some kind of huhū. Two families or even three families [used to live together]. What people nowadays think and people back then used to think are completely different.

Education in Japan when we were there differed a great deal from modern education. Japan nowadays is different from the past when we considered morals, training of the mind, much more important education than scholastic achievement. We studied that the most in school. So loyalty and filial piety were moral. Although it might sound hardheaded to modern Japanese, we used to believe in sacrificing our lives for the Emperor and our country. But Japanese nowadays think nothing of that sort, which I regret.

My kid came over the other day and said to me, "Dad, after we get married, we'll be leaving home." I said, "I see, I see, but bumbai things might be hard for you." When he leaves home, he has to live with a stranger, which is different from when he is living with his own family. This family system is nice, though individualism is fine, depending on time and circumstances. He won't say which is better, so I don't know what he is thinking. (Laughs)

American society is based on individualism. When it comes to American movies and Japanese family movies, I like them both. But American movies don't have morals, Americans don't teach morals in their movies, not like Japanese-made movies do. Japanese movies are good because they teach morals like "I will die for my country," or the idea that fathers and mothers wouldn't even mind dying if it was for their children.

(With his voice shaking:) But I don't see morals among Japanese nowadays at all. I regret that Japanese don't have much morality these days. That is because what was called shūshin [moral],

discipline] has been got rid of by the socialists of Japan and America. So shūshin has disappeared because of them. I don't think there is anything wrong with the kyōiku chokugo [Imperial rescript on education] which I used to listen to. It was written that no matter what you were, you must serve the country to which you belong. I don't see anything wrong with it. But the Socialist Party--Japan's Socialist Party, not America's--they said there were parts in kyōiku chokugo which were not proper. So it's not used in school nowadays.

And another thing they say Kimigayo, the Japanese national anthem, is bad. I say there is nothing wrong with it. They may say that it's bad because it considers the Emperor superior. But if Japan didn't have the Emperor, it would have been pau; the country would have been scattered just like the contents of a [stone] mill without an axle. Just as Japan has the Emperor, there was a head of the family in each home, the master, who kept the family together. And if there was no morality . . . [repeats point about the mill as an axle of morality]

So Japan used to have a better family system if I may say so, and I don't like the present trend. So I often disagree with young people.

MK: It's different now, isn't it?

UM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: It depends on education, doesn't it?

UM: Yes.

MK: Morihara-san, what school did you go to when you were young?

UM: I just went to elementary school, I went to an elementary school for six years.

MK: Do you remember the name of the elementary school?

UM: It was Yanai Elementary School.

MK: How were the teachers at the school?

UM: They were very strict about education, uh, teachers nowadays (laughs) can't be compared with the teachers who taught then, because of their intelligence.

MK: What was so different about them?

UM: Anyway, freedom, do you understand freedom? This freedom, this idea has been mistaken. What the young people nowadays consider freedom is selfishness, to me, not freedom, but selfishness. Freedom has a limit, is within the boundaries. This is freedom, acting within limits. But selfishness is doing whatever one wants,

without regard to limits. Freedom does not allow selfishness. This is where I feel that modern education is completely different from education in our time.

One ought to leave one's selfishness, one's own self behind for the society. One ought to think big. Even when you think your way is the best, if someone disagrees, you must think it over. And when you realize this person's opinion is right, you must do it his way. But people nowadays are too self-centered. They do things selfishly. We weren't allowed to.

MK: This idea was from shūshin education?

UM: This shūshin, uh, we didn't have a book for it. You may wonder where it came from. It came from China. In China there is a book called Rongo. If you read this Rongo [the Analects of Confucius]-another one is Shisho--[the Four Chinese Classics] you will find this book tells you how a human should live, thoroughly. In Chinese proverbs it is said, "Shisu tomo tōsui wa nomazu," which means you would rather die than drink stolen water. I like Chinese proverbs. Most teaching of shūshin in Japan came from China, Kōshi [Confucius], who was a great man, and Yōshin, who was also a great man. And Shisho came in and then this wartime book became popular in Japan. And these books taught how to live as a good human being.

MK: Besides shūshin, what did you study?

UM: Besides shūshin, (laughs) how to write. And, uh, . . . in shūshin, it's difficult to explain. In shūshin it's written that we must be loyal to our country, that we must serve our parents, that brothers and sisters must help each other. But we don't just read this shūshin. We were taught . . . (inaudible) . . . for instance, studying under the light of fireflies when poor, something like that--that because poverty, there was no money to buy fuel for light, so studying was done under the light of fireflies or moon. So, shūshin was a series of stories. We were taught this shūshin through high school until we got into a university where we could study history or whatever we had wondered about and then wrote a thesis. But until then teachers filled students' needs. So shushin was not a book, it's a series of stories of the old days (inaudible) . . .

There is a story called "Chūshingura" in which Kuranosuke Oishi was the hero. If you read this story, you will understand duty and loyalty and everything: why Kozuke Kira trapped Takuminokami Asano, and why his loyal vassal Oishi took revenge for his master who had been good to him. This is the story of the forty-seven rōnin [warriors]. This is shūshin which couldn't be written in a book.

MK: What subject did you like best in school?

UM: I didn't like [to study] very much when I was young. It was when I got a bit older that I realized that education was important. So I was behind. When I was young, I didn't think much about what to do, what I wanted to become. I didn't think seriously [about the future].

MK: Which subject were you good at in school?

UM: Well, I suppose it was manners.

MK: Well--(pause)--Mr. Morihara, when you compare yourself with your brothers and sisters, did you go to school more than they did, or less?

UM: Just as much as everybody else. (Pause) Anyway, we weren't rich and my father didn't let us go to school to study because he didn't have much money. And there were many children to feed. He didn't let us go, he couldn't. That's why I went to yagaku, night school.

MK: That was later on, after you came to Kona.

UM: In Japan, too.

MK: Did you go to night school in Japan, too?

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: When was it that you went to a night school in Japan?

UM: I finished school when I was twelve. And my uncle was well-educated, so I went to his place at night. I studied by myself.

MK: Was your uncle a teacher?

UM: No, he was a doctor.

MK: A doctor?

UM: Yes, he was a doctor.

MK: What did you study at night school?

UM: What I was studying then was Shisho and Rongo, which taught how a human being must live.

MK: You told me before that you used to help your family in the fields when you weren't at school, didn't you? When you were young, you kōkua your parents, didn't you?

UM: Yes. I did.

MK: When did you use to wake up to kōkua on a regular day?

UM: Well, I did whatever my father told me to do. Since I was still a kid, I didn't have my own ideas about what to do. So (pause) since I was the fourth son, I wouldn't inherit the house. That's why I left home to be adopted by marriage. I was adopted when I was 19. And in those days, I did whatever my father told me to do. Since my father told me to leave home to be adopted, I did. If I had it all to do over again, I probably wouldn't do it.

After I was adopted, I joined the military. And I fought in the Russo-Japanese war. And when I came back, I began to understand society. That was when I was 24. And I began to realize that it would be foolish to be just a farmer in Japan for the rest of my life, that I must get out somewhere. But in Japan, no matter where I went, I would be taken back home. I thought of foreign countries. And I decided on Hawaii.

MK: Why did you think that being a farmer was no good?

UM: That? (Laughs) There is nothing as foolish as being a farmer. Why? Because farmers do not price their own goods. The [retailing] company decides on the price of their products. For instance, this [item] is five cents, and this [item] is ten cents. They are priced for sale, watches and so forth. And they are all priced by the sellers.

But in the case of the farmers, it's not the sellers but the buyers who set the price. In Hawaii, when we sell coffee, we figure the costs: the land cost, the interest, the fertilizer, etc., then we decide how much it should be per pound. It's all right being a farmer if you can do this. But when the seller decides the price . . . on the produce . . . when it costs five yen . . . but you sell it for four yen and fifty sen, losing fifty sen, this is how it hurts to be a farmer.

I thought about this when we were growing rice one year. And after the harvest, we stored it. And we decided how much it ought to be after figuring all the costs. But if the buyer said, "I won't buy it for more than four yen," while our price was five or six yen, we had to sell it, even if we lost two yen, which was part of our labor. Because we couldn't store it very long. There was nothing we could do. This is what I mean, that it hurt, being a farmer. But until then, I didn't realize this. It was the first time I realized this.

In Hawaii, we say that it's only fair that we, the sellers, not the buyers, put the price on, for instance, coffee or sugar. "It's the sugar I made, I'll say how much, I won't sell it for any less than this. If you don't like it, don't buy it," I'll say. And eventually they'll buy it. But the farmers were afraid that they wouldn't.

There was a mill here and it used to buy coffee. And sometimes the price was 30 cents or 20 cents. It still brings a good price, \$15 per bag. Since I came to Hawaii, the worst price has been 75 cents [a pound], red coffee that was. To produce this one red coffee,

the labor to harvest it cost 50 cents. And the farmers had to live on the remaining 50 cents. That's why I pity the farmers.

In Japan . . . (repetition of the rice price) The price we asked was for our labor. Company workers can strike, but what would happen if the farmers did that, instead of growing rice? Japanese people would starve to death. The farmers used to work so hard all day long, but all they got was 25 cents. But since they had to eat, they had to work. They had to agree with the buyer. This is why I say it's unfair. I say this even now.

I think if all [the farmers] refuse to sell coffee because they disagree with the price the buyers offer, the price will go up. I don't think the farmers are smart enough to realize this. I hate to say this, but they are dumb people. People who remain farmers are not very smart. I wonder if your father is a farmer or not, (laughs) but they are dumb.

Nowadays, hourly wages are between--three and four dollars, aren't they? But when I came to Hawaii the first time, my salary was \$13 per month.

MK: Thirteen dollars a month!

UM: Yes. I wanted a raise, but they [the employer] wouldn't [give it to me]. So [I] quit my job. [I] preferred not to go to work.

I don't like the American government's policy on food stamps. Food stamps are given to the people who don't work. These people are spoiled. I don't like it. It makes people not want to work. It's okay to give food stamps to those who are too poor to buy their food, have too many children to feed, or are sick. It's good to help these people in society. What I'm talking about is those who are healthy and capable of work. They are too rich to walk. They shouldn't drive a car if they are poor enough to get food stamps. They are too spoiled. Anybody can get them. I see lots of people buying with food stamps. I don't think the policy is working too well.

Getting back to the farmers, if they had been a little smarter, they could have insisted on their price for their coffee, considering their costs, how much for this, how much for that. But they couldn't. When I was working in coffee, they [coffee farmers] couldn't manage anymore [when coffee prices were very low]. The farmers used to get loans. And they paid them back at the end of the year. They had borrowed money [but they couldn't pay it back], so they went bankrupt. In South Kona, there used to be 60 stores. How many are left now? Less than 20. That happened during the war. Among those who quit the business were [American] Factors and Captain Cook [Coffee Company], who loaned the money to the farmers and went bankrupt. So farmers were hurt the most. I sympathize with them.

The farmers are the foundation of a nation. If it weren't for them, business and technology couldn't exist. We have the present because there have been farmers. If we want sugar, we need people who make it. The ideal would be for people, including the farmers themselves, to realize this. And farmers should determine the price of what they produce. But I don't expect this to happen in reality. Farmers shouldn't stay just farmers.

MK: That's why you gave up on being a farmer?

UM: Yes. When I came back from the Russo-Japanese War.

MK: I would like to go back a little. Can you tell me about the military? Why did you join it?

UM: Well, I think it's better not to talk about it much. I'll tell you why. The Japanese military constitution was based on chokugo [Imperial rescript]. And it said we must regard the Emperor as our head, and the soldiers and the rest of us as his arms and legs, and in that respect, we are closely related. That was written in the chokugo. I'm afraid you can't understand it. There was nothing like it in the American military.

MK: Yes. It is different.

UM: Yes, it is. That's why I don't want to talk about it very much.

MK: But can you tell me a little bit? It was the Japanese-Russian war when you were in the military, wasn't it?

UM: Yes, that's right.

MK: And in that war, where were you?

UM: I went to Manchuria, Hōten it was. (inaudible) That was where the Russian soldiers were defeated, and the war came to an end, with Roosevelt acting as peace-maker. Anyway, you wouldn't believe how strict the military was in those days.

MK: For instance, how strict was it?

UM: For about two hours every night . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Go ahead.

UM: It's something like this, when you get married you take a vow in front of the priest that you will take care of each other, don't you? We did something similar to that when we joined the military.

(recites some phrase from chokugo.) I will not break the rules, etc. . . You must obey your superior's orders. There were grades according to class and seniority. Suppose you were in the Japanese military and a first-class officer: I would have had to obey your orders even if you were younger than I was. You give me orders, I don't give you orders. That's what taking the vow was all about, to submit yourself to your superiors. The military put this idea into the soldiers' heads.

And when one was asked a question by his superior, he'd better say, "I forgot." If he said, "I don't know," he'd get into big trouble.

The superior would say, "What do you mean, 'I don't know?' I asked you a question!"

But if he [soldier] had answered, "I forgot," (laughs) he usually was forgiven easily. They were extremely strict in the old days, not like nowadays.

MK: What was your job in the military?

UM: Nothing in particular. I was just a soldier. I joined in 1905. As I told you before, the Japanese were invading the place called Hōten. There was . . . (mumbling, not quite comprehensible, describing the location or strategy at the battleground). And there was a supply house where they kept food, explosives, etc., which the Japanese didn't know about. Without knowing that, they tried to mount a raid on the enemy. And the Hiroshima troops were all wiped out. All the soldiers died.

The enemy had the machine guns, the Japanese didn't. The strategy they had then was to move ahead in groups, ten meters at a time, if that was the distance ordered by the chief. That was called tōshaku o kiru [cut in measures of ten]. But they were all shot down in rows. (Repetition of the strategy.) While a Japanese gun could only shoot five bullets before it had to reload, a machine gun could shoot continuously, bang-bang-bang. So almost everybody who belonged to the Goshi troop and the Kokushi troop from Kunamoto died in Hōten.

MK: How did you feel then?

UM: I joined [the troop] when there were three or four people left. Shortly after that we took Hōten. The Russians were defeated. And when I was in Shō, or Shōtofu, where we had our troop, the Russians tried to mount a counterattack. But we again defeated them. The strategy we used to attack them was called tokkan [rushing the enemy], which was to rush into their foxholes and stab them with swords, not using guns. That's how we defeated them. (Laughs) And that was when Roosevelt stepped in and the treaty was made. And the war ended in Hōten I was honored and given a medal, Kun Hatto, for this battle we won. We weren't thinking of our own lives at that time. All we thought about was that we must win. We

used to say, "Kateba kangun makereba zoku," meaning "Might is right." No matter how you fight, even having to kick, as long as you win, you are all right. That's why I say there was a great difference between the way Japanese felt [about the war] and the way the Americans felt.

Talking about the war [World War II] between Japan and America, if it weren't for the atomic bomb, the war would not have ended then. (Pause) The bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and they destroyed both cities. It was in Hiroshima where the food and ammunition were kept; they were shipped from Mishima. That's why (laughs) the bomb was dropped there and everything was destroyed. But the army did not want to surrender, they still wanted to fight . . . (mumbles). Who was it, the prime minister then, and the Emperor announced (chokes) the unconditional surrender to say that Japan had lost the war. But there was still some fighting going on in Okinawa even after we surrendered. In Okinawa, there was the Himeyuri troop, and they fought on, but they lost. So Japan lost the war and American troops were sent to Okinawa.

That was when the Japanese who were in Mexico or Canada formed a club, "Katta Gumi [Victory Group]." I was in Santa Fe at that time, and somebody asked me, "What do you think?"

I told him, "Don't talk about who won or lost. If you let the enemy land on your soil, you will lose. If Japan wanted to win, why then didn't they land on American soil when they attacked Hawaii, (mumbles) bombing the warships in Pearl Harbor. I wouldn't say that the Japanese won in Hawaii, because they didn't land there. They should have landed. America landed in Okinawa and also in Southeast Asia. Japan was defeated by America. You are defeated by America. You are defeated at the point your enemy lands and hoists up their national flag. That's the truth. Be sensible."

MK: How many people were there in the "Katta Gumi" in Santa Fe?

UM: I couldn't tell. Anyway, the people who belonged to this "Katta Gumi" were from the region, not from internees [from Hawaii]. They were young people from the California coast who had been sent to relocation camps, especially up in Canada. They were the ones who were saying that Japan hadn't lost the war, but had won. They couldn't say that Japan had lost.

I said, "Nonsense! It's foolish even to discuss it." (Repetition of his theory of winning) Japan surrendered unconditionally. And if it weren't for the Emperor's announcement, (chokes) the army and the navy wouldn't have surrendered. Not even the Prime Minister or the generals of the army and navy could have convinced them. It had to be the Emperor. (chokes) They were winning in actual battles, but the bomb made them surrender. In Okinawa, the Himeyuri troops, these women soldiers killed American soldiers with handmade bamboo spears, since those were the only weapons they had. They didn't have guns. Have you heard about this?

MK: Yes, I have.

UM: That's why I said it's nonsense even to discuss [who won or lost].

MK: The Russo-Japanese War was different from World War II, wasn't it?

UM: Definitely.

MK: During the Russo-Japanese war, how much was your salary as a soldier?

UM: Salary? There wasn't a salary. Japanese soldiers got pocket money enough to buy cigarettes.

MK: Really?

UM: Yes. Just a few sen, that's all. We served for free. Japanese soldiers (pauses to light a cigarette) went to the war not for the money, but because it was their duty. It was a matter of our nation. We were taught to serve our nation. It's not for the money. It's very different [from the American way]. When I was in Hoten, my parents, not my government used to send me money, since I was broke and couldn't buy enough cigarettes. I remember I was given six sen per day, which was one yen and eighty sen a month. That was not enough.

MK: Did you join the military because you thought it was your duty?

UM: No, it was a law in Japan. When the Meiji Emperor started the Japanese government, it was stated that all Japanese, I mean males, were to become soldiers. Every male in Japan had to fight the war. The Emperor Meiji said that women also should support the war, although they didn't actually go to the battlefields.

MK: So the war ended and you came back. And you decided to come to Hawaii since you felt being a farmer wouldn't be a good thing to do. Is that right?

UM: Yes.

MK: Why did you decide on Hawaii?

UM: Because my brother was in Hawaii. That's why I decided to come here. When I came here, at that time, maybe you don't know about this, but there were restrictions on immigration. People who lived in Hawaii had been allowed to move onto the America mainland. And there was the "Aka Shimbun" [?] in California. And because of this no people were allowed to come to Hawaii from Japan as immigrants. As for me, people who had relatives in Hawaii to take responsibility for them so they wouldn't cause any trouble were allowed to come, so in my case, my brother was here, that's how I got to come here.

MK: What's your brother's name?

UM: His name is Kunisaburo Nago. He was here. And he was about to go back to Japan. But I asked him to stay until I got here. And after I got here he went back [to Japan].

MK: What was his job?

UM: He was working at Greenwell, which I mentioned before, so I went there, too.

MK: What was he doing at Greenwell?

UM: Laundry, he was doing laundry.

MK: When did he come originally?

UM: Well, it must have been when I was about 12.

MK: He'd been staying for a long time, hadn't he?

UM: Yes. When I came here, I was 24. So he'd been there for 12 to 13 years.

MK: Since your brother had been in Kona, Hawaii, for more than ten years,

UM: He was in Hilo, at a plantation. In those days, on the plantations, you probably won't understand this, but you know the word, slave, don't you? They treated the workers as if they were slaves. I went to see a camp one day, there even the kaukau was cause for worry. The workers slept like silkworm cocoons [on boards] in houses that were lined up row after row. And the lunas were usually Portuguese. There were incidents of cruelty.

The plantation workers used to drink shōyu in order to have a fever. They would go to see a doctor and he would say, "Don't go to work, but rest at home." So they wouldn't go to work. But when the camp police found out about this, they were not about to allow anybody to be absent from work, even if he was really sick. They used to drag him into the sugar field and force him to work. They were so cruel, they used to treat the workers like slaves. Then, gradually, things got strict. And Nippu Jiji's Yasutaro Soga and Mr. Kinsaburo Makino started a strike in Oahu. I'm afraid you don't know, do you? (Laughs)

MK: Yes, I do.

UM: You do? Like I said, they were treated like slaves, although they were given a salary, 35 cents a day, which made a mere ten dollars a month. The owners were mean. And since those Japanese workers didn't think there was any future on the plantation, they were running away.

MK: Did your brother run away, too?

UM: Yes, he did. He ran away with two or three others, from Hilo to Kona. And here in Kona, he went to work for a while. When I think back about the plantation, I feel they must have thought of the workers like cats or dogs. The Japanese, even when I got there, were regarded as lower class citizens. Ketō [Westerners] used to be proud of themselves and looked down on Japanese, thinking of us like cats or dogs. The Ketō, the whites, used to do cruel things. Nowadays, Japan has established itself and its power, and some Ketō work under Japanese management. There is a world of difference between the time I first came here and now.

MK: Did you know about these things before you came to Hawaii?

UM: No, I didn't know until I got here. One time, on either Washington's Birthday or Independence Day, I wanted to go to Kalahiki, so I asked my boss for the day off. He said, "I am not American, but British. I don't celebrate such a day as Independence Day." Of course, they had lost the war; anyway, he said that he wouldn't give us the day off.

I said [to myself], "Fine, suit yourself." But he had a daughter, Amy was her name. I knew her well, so I told her that since Henry [Amy's father] wouldn't give us the day off and let us have the horses, we wouldn't be able to go out today, and asked her if she could help us change Henry's mind. She asked where we were going to go, and I told her that I was going to ride to Kalahiki on horseback. So she asked Henry, my boss, to let us have the horses.

In Ketōs' households, daughters have a lot of power. Henry didn't listen to me, but when his daughter Amy asked him, he said, "All right, do what you want!" And this Amy told the cowboys to bring three horses with saddles for us. That's how we got to go. This Englishman Henry was so stubborn that he didn't like the Fourth of July, Independence Day.

And another time there was this terrible thing. I can't say it too loud, but there was a person who used to work with us; at that time there was the main house and the laundry quarters at the Greenwells' [place], and this man who was working at the main house started having an affair with a daughter of someone who worked at the laundry, and she got pregnant.

I asked what was wrong, and the daughter said she was pregnant. I said, "What?" and she told me what had happened. Then I understood everything and said, "That's too bad, but why didn't you get married," and scolded him [the father of the child] severely, saying, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to keep this secret until now that the baby is coming."

And when he [the father of the child] was visiting my house, he [identity unclear, possibly Henry Greenwell or another member of household] came, saying he was going to shoot this boy, and that he

shouldn't be in my house. I told him that the house was given to me, and it's my right to invite this boy in, there was nothing wrong with inviting him in, and asked the guy with a gun to leave. And I told him that I would tell Mrs. Greenwell about the incident. He asked me not to, but I did. And then I told this boy [father of the child] not to come back to my house that day since I was afraid the Brit might kill him. They [the British] really looked down on us Japanese.

MK: Those were bad days.

UM: That was when I was 26. I told him to shoot me instead of the guy. I told him to shoot me if he thought that I did something wrong in inviting the boy in. Since I had been in the military, I wasn't afraid to die. So I told [the Britisher], "Shoot me."

"I can't shoot you," he said.

So I sent the boy home.

Yes. Just like that, the British used to look down on the Japanese.

MK: You weren't expecting things like that, were you?

UM: No.

MK: What did you know about Hawaii before you came?

UM: I didn't know anything then. But I didn't see any future in being a farmer in Japan, as I told you before that we couldn't even set prices on our own produce, which I thought was so unfair. I thought no matter how hard I tried, I wouldn't be successful if I remained a farmer in Japan. So I wanted to try my luck in Hawaii, and after I got here, I sent quite a lot of money to Japan. And they [UM's family in Japan] bought quite a lot of land.

And then, in Japan, the Socialist Party took over the government, and they passed a law which allowed all the farmers to own the land which they'd been leasing and cultivating, which had belonged to the owners. The Socialist Party is to blame. I still don't think anything good about the Socialist Party. And I was one of those who had owned the land. I lost all the land I owned. I had to give the land away to those who had been the tenants. I was not given even five sen. I was mad. I was mad at the Japanese law. If it had been land I'd inherited, I wouldn't have minded it so much, but it was the estate that I had earned by working in Hawaii. It was not fair.

I didn't want to belong to Japan, so [later, in the 1950's] I broke away and became an American citizen when the Congress passed a law that Japanese people were eligible for American citizenship. I was among the first group of people who became citizens of America. I gave up on Japan then, I decided not to go back to Japan except on vacations.

- MK: Because your land, which you had sent the money to buy, was confiscated?
- UM: Yes. It was unfair. It was the land I had bought with the money I had worked for. It would have been okay if it had been land inherited from my ancestors.
- MK: How much money did you send?
- UM: Quite a lot, probably \$2,000 at that time.
- MK: How many years did it take you [to save that much money]?
- UM: Three years. Three years of work was completely pau. And two years later, five years after I got here, that is, I went to Japan.
- MK: What did your parents think about your coming to Hawaii?
- UM: What?
- MK: When you left Japan, what did your mother and father think about your coming to Hawaii?
- UM: My real parents said to go ahead and try it, but my adopted parents didn't want me to go since they were afraid I wouldn't return. So I promised that I would return in five years. So I had five years. And I went back after five years, and went back to farming. But the situation was the same as before I left. I realized that I shouldn't stay there foolishly.

So I asked my wife if she wanted to come with me or stay with her father. And I told her if she wanted to come with me, I would take her to Hawaii, but if she wanted to stay with her father, I would give her a divorce right away, and I would go to Hawaii on my own.

And this wife of mine said, "I will go with you if you take me."

So we said, "Let's go," and went to my parents' home. We had two children then. We left my parents' home without telling [her parents] that we were going. My aunt in Tomachi was very angry but it didn't bother me. I would rather they thought that I'd died. I didn't want to look back. I told them I had no regrets about leaving Japan or about the estate I might inherit. I even told them that I would not take anything with me, and they could have all that I'd owned which I had bought with the money I'd made in Hawaii. I gave all my belongings away.

And when my father died [later], I called [over to Hawaii] my brothers, including my eldest brother, since he also wanted to come. And there was nobody left in Japan when the law took effect on the land matter. Since we were absentee landlords, people told us to come back and sell our land. So I went back, only to find that the law had already taken effect, and our land belonged to the tenant farmers. Anyway, I'm an old-fashioned man.

MK: You'd sent so much money

UM: But I've forgotten all about it now. All the blame is on the Socialist Party. I hate this guy, Hitoshi Yoshida. The Socialist Party even nowadays is full of stupid people. It has a little bit more hair [i.e., is a little better] than the Communist Party, . . . so . . . (mumbles) I don't like the Kōmeitō Party either.

MK: Well, shall we stop here today? May I come back again tomorrow?

UM: All right.

END OF INTERVIEW.

Tape No. 9-28-2-80 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Usaku Morihara (UM)

December 17, 1980

Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Mako Mantzel.]

MK: Interview with Usaku Morihara at his home in Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii, on December 17, 1980. Mr. Morihara, you came to Kona, Hawaii, on the Mongolia Maru in 1907, leaving your wife in Japan.

UM: Mm hm [yes].

MK: What did you think of Kona when you first came?

UM: I thought it was a great place, with clean air and good water.

MK: After you arrived in Kona, you started working for Greenwell, didn't you?

UM: Yes.

MK: How come you started working at Greenwell?

UM: Because I didn't care to be a farmer. I wanted to do something else. But I didn't have money to start [a business], so I thought I had to make money first. I started working for a white household, since I thought I could make money fast that way.

MK: You told me before that your brother was here in Kona before you came.

UM: Yes, he was.

MK: What was he doing at Greenwell?

UM: My brother was doing the laundry at Greenwell.

MK: So your brother called for you, right?

UM: No, he didn't. I came on my own.

MK: You came on your own.

UM: Yes.

MK: You started as a cook at Greenwell, didn't you? Can you tell me about it?

UM: (Laughs) Well, I didn't know very much about it at first. Arthur Greenwell's was a busy place. They used to hire cooks from Honolulu, but they didn't stay. They would leave in a month or two, because it was extremely busy. There was no one. The family itself was small, three or four people, but there were a lot of cowboys, so the cooks had to cook for the family and the cowboys, who were the employees. And there were four others, stable boys, a laundry person, and a yard boy. It was very busy. So the cooks who had worked for families in Honolulu couldn't last at Greenwell's, a ranch, where they had to cook for many cowboys. They even had to fix bentōs when the cowboys went to the mountains. It was so busy that cooks didn't stay.

Later, there was a cook who came from Ka'u. He didn't like the place. He said he'd never worked in such a busy place. And he said that I should become a cook, and offered to teach me how to cook. His name was Ishida. I asked the [Greenwell's] daughter if it was okay to become a cook.

She said, "That's fine, go ahead and learn [how to cook]."

So I started learning to cook. It took me a month or two before I actually became a cook. And when I didn't know how to cook, this daughter came and taught me how. It was hard, since I couldn't understand what she was saying, and she didn't understand me. It was hard for her, too.

She was a kind girl, though. And since she was so kind--although she was a daughter of a rich family--I was so impressed that I decided to work hard for this family. I thought it must be a good family to work for, if the daughter treated an employee that nice. If it were in Japan, a daughter of an employer wouldn't even speak to an employee. But this girl--her name was Amy--was such a nice girl. When I got sick, she used to bring me some kaukau. When I caught cold and was feeling bad, she put some--not alcohol, I think it was camphor oil--on my body. She was so kind that I got an impression that Ketō [Westerners] must be kind. Since she was so kind to me, I decided to work hard [for the Greenwells] for the rest of my life. She used to tell me that I was a hard worker. I worked so hard that she had to tell me to rest. She told me to take a nap after I finished cooking lunch, but I told her that I wouldn't. I worked from morning to night.

And the boss trusted me, too. He left all sort of things up to me. He let me set up menus, which the daughter used to be in charge of: what to cook for breakfast, lunch, and so forth, after a year or so, after I became a cook. The daughter didn't tell me what to cook; instead, she told me to cook whatever I thought best. She also told me to order meat or whatever I wanted. So they let me be in charge of everything, breakfast and all. They trusted me so much that they even gave me a key to the safe. When they went to America, they told me to take charge of the house. They were gone for about half a year. They also went to Japan while I was taking care of the house. They virtually gave me total control over the house. I sometimes opened up the safe just to see how much money they had. I found "too much" money. I thought they were stupid not to put the money in the bank to earn interest. But then, I thought they weren't so tight with money. They really trusted me. And I was going to go back to Japan after five years, as I had promised. . . .

MK: You worked for Greenwell for five years before you went back to Japan, didn't you?

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: How much was your pay during those five years?

UM: The pay was \$45. I got \$45, which wasn't too bad. Plantation workers got \$18. I was given kaukau and clothing. So mine was a pretty good deal. And I went back to Japan after five years, although they asked me to stay.

MK: Why did you decide to go back?

UM: Well, that was because, when I left Japan, I promised that I would return after five years, since my wife was afraid that I would never return. I promised my wife in Japan, so I went back. After I went back, I started farming. But I thought of the good weather here, where I didn't have to work with dirt on my hands and feet like a farmer. I decided to come back to Hawaii, and I did.

MK: So for the second time . . .

UM: Yes, the second time.

MK: Did you come to Hawaii with your wife?

UM: Yes, I did. I told my wife I would divorce her so she could remarry someone else if she didn't come with me to Hawaii, where I was determined to go. She told me that she would come with me, although it meant that she had to leave her father. So I said, "All right, in that case," and we left her father and came here. (Laughs)

MK: Were you thinking about working in Honolulu between 1912 and 1913?

UM: Yes, that's right.

MK: Can you tell me about it?

UM: Well, a person who was looking for a cook who would work in Honolulu came to me. He asked me if I could cook. I said I could. He asked me if I would work in Honolulu as a cook. I asked him how much they would pay me. He said \$85, that was as a couple. I thought it was pretty good, and I said I would work. I was going to work for the captain of a ship named Likeli until my wife said that we should go to Kona, where her relatives and friends from Hawaii were. So I declined to go to Honolulu and came here.

MK: When you came to Kona again, you worked at Huehue Ranch.

UM: Yes. That was about a week or so after we arrived. We were at our friends' house, doing nothing, when someone came from McGuire [who was] with Huehue [Ranch] to hire me. His name was Shimizu. But I told him that there wouldn't be anybody who could afford to hire me [to work] in country like that [i.e., Huehue]. When he asked me how much I wanted, I told him that I wouldn't work for less than \$85, that I could have a job in Honolulu for \$85 as a couple if I wanted to take it. He went to talk to McGuire and came to ask me if I would lower the bid a little. I told him I wouldn't, that I would work for \$85, that I wouldn't otherwise. I made a deal, that I would work for them for a month without pay to see if I was worth \$85 a month, and that if I wasn't worth it, I wouldn't ask for even five cents. In that case, all they had to pay was the transportation, to and from. I told him that. They accepted the deal, that they would pay \$85 if I was worth it, and they wanted me to come. So I went.

They [McGuire family] were kanaka-hapa and there was this old woman who was mean. She was a hao-le-hapa, but she was awful. Everybody warned me about her, but I told them she probably wouldn't kill me, no matter how bad she was. I was pretty sure I could handle her. So I went.

About two weeks after I started working, the boss came to say that I had been working very hard. I told him that I was quite confident in my hard work, that I worked harder than anybody else. I also told him that he wouldn't find a finer cook than me in all Kona, and if he had any doubt, he should check. He told me that I was very good, that he wanted me to stay, and that he would pay \$85. I told him okay. And I got \$85.

After a year or so, though, I had a fight with this old mother [of the boss], over baked apples. Since she was bossy, telling me what to do, I asked her what kind of cooking she knew, and told her since my cooking was French, I wouldn't understand her Hawaiian-style cooking. And I also told her to ask any French cook if I was doing anything wrong, and told her she was lōlō. (Laughs) After I said that, I told her I was pau there, that they should hire somebody else for a cook, that I was going to leave tomorrow.

I went to the boss, who was at the slaughterhouse where they killed cows, to tell him that I was quitting the next day, giving a month's notice until he found somebody else a cook. He asked me why, so I told him what had happened, that I had had a fight with the "Missus" [McGuire's mother].

"About what?" he asked.

"About baked apples," I said.

He said, "I see. So what happened?"

I told him that the "Missus [McGuire's mother]" had told me that I was doing wrong, and I had told her that since I was a French cook, I didn't understand her Hawaiian-style cooking, which was different from mine, and that I would rather quit than listen to her complaints so much.

He said, "Wait a minute, I will tell her."

He went down and told her off pretty thoroughly and told her that she was not permitted in the kitchen from then on. He told me to stay and assured me that the old woman would not bother me anymore. I told him that I didn't mind her being in the kitchen if she could tell me nicely if my cooking was wrong, that she didn't have to shout at me, since I had perfectly good ears. They begged me to stay, now that the old woman was not going to bother me. So I said, "All right, I'll stay," and I stayed there for three years.

(UM has difficulty with hearing aid.)

MK: Did you cook three meals a day?

UM: What?

MK: You cooked in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening?

UM: Yes, that's right.

MK: Did you pay anything for a room?

UM: What?

MK: When you were a cook at the McGuire ranch, did you pay for your room?

UM: No. Since it was a ranch, there was a store for the cowboys. I took care of that, too, although the cooks before me didn't. They [all] told me, including an old man who was about 80 years old, that I was a hard worker. They asked me not to leave when I left. A year after I started working for them, our firstborn, a daughter, was born, and I wanted to quit, so I told this old man to look for another cook. He told me that it was okay to stay even after the baby was born, that he would give me all the food and the clothes for the baby. So I stayed, since the deal was good.

And when the second child, who is now in America, was born, I decided to leave, because it didn't seem to be a very good idea to keep working for someone; instead, I thought of starting something else. So I bought a coffee field. That was a mistake, though.

MK: You started the coffee business--sometime between 1915 and 1916, didn't you?

UM: Well, I started the coffee business--sometime between 1916 and 1917.

MK: How was it? That coffee business.

UM: This coffee business was a big mistake.

MK: How so?

UM: Because the coffee price went down.

MK: From how much to how much?

UM: The coffee price had been 25 cents to 26 cents, but it went down to 6-1/2 cents. I couldn't manage it. I bought the coffee field for \$2300.

MK: From who?

UM: A man called Mr. Nishioka. Anyway, I bought it for \$2300. Since I had money, I paid all cash. And I built a house, since there wasn't a house on it. Meanwhile, two or three years later, I ended up having a debt of \$2300 to [American] Factors. I said that there was no future in my coffee business, having such a big debt to [American] Factors. I told [my wife] that we should quit the coffee business. And I asked [American] Factors to buy the field back at \$2300, which is what I had paid. I said that it was a fair trade, since they wouldn't pohō any money. But they didn't buy that deal, instead they asked me to pay off the debt in cash. I told them that I couldn't pay, because I didn't have any money. So I started buying coffee, instead of growing it, while I let my wife take care of our coffee field. You see?

MK: What did you start doing?

UM: Buying coffee. I stopped growing coffee and started buying it instead.

MK: Oh, you mean buying and selling coffee.

UM: Yes, that's right.

MK: How did you start that, buying and selling coffee?

UM: Because we couldn't live on growing coffee. We had to eat taro with salt. It was hard to live. I decided that we couldn't live by growing coffee, so I started buying instead. When I left Japan,

my father told me that, no matter where I went, I should keep an eye on what the main product is sugar; in Kona, it's coffee which people depend on. So, as my father told me, I thought I should keep coffee in mind.

Since I had failed at growing coffee, I decided to buy it. But it wasn't that easy, I didn't have money to buy coffee, since I'd lost a lot of money. Anyway, when I was working at Greenwell, I knew a stepdaughter of Greenwell's; her name was Nora. She had married a man, who was the president of the Bank of Hawaii. I asked him if I could borrow some money from him to buy some coffee. He said he would [lend me some]. I offered collateral, but he told me I didn't have to do that, but just to go ahead, since he would get as much money as I needed. So I bought. This bank became People's Bank later; anyway, he trusted me and lent me some money. That's how I made money.

I lent some money to coffee growers; they brought the coffee as soon as they produced [it]. I paid money to those others to whom I hadn't lent money, when they brought coffee. I could borrow as much money as I needed. The manager then was Mr. Morita, whose son is a president of City Bank. He told me that he would lend me as much money as I wanted. I used to buy coffee from the mill which was owned by Mr. Yōichi Takakuwa, who's dead now. And I used to buy from Hamakua. That's how I made money. So Mr. Morita and I made quite a bit of money then. That's how I bought this shop.

MK: You mean you bought this Honaunau store?

UM: Yes. And this store was a good deal, too because it was cheap at the time.

MK: Who did you buy this store from?

UM: From Ah Wah, a Chinese.

MK: How much did you pay for this store?

UM: I think it was \$2600.

MK: It was December, 1919, when you bought it, wasn't it?

UM: Yes. It was between 1919 and 1920. It was December 1919 when I came here, although I don't remember exactly what day it was.

MK: So--(pause)--you bought the shop with the money you made selling coffee.

UM: Yes. I did.

MK: So--(pause)--what kind of customers did you have in the store?

UM: Here? You mean the customers?

MK: Yes.

UM: Natives [Hawaiians].

MK: What did they buy?

UM: Mainly foods, since it was a grocery store.

MK: Did they pay money then?

UM: Yes, yes. I dealt in cash. I ran a grocery and dry goods store since there wasn't any other dry goods around here in Kona then, although there were many grocery stores. There were Davies [Company] and Factors, and I belonged to Davies. Mr. Porter, who was the boss of the Davies company, said that I ought to expand my shop, and that shoes would be a good business. They took care of the financing, so I used to buy 1000s of dollars' worth of shoes from Davies. Those shoes were imported shoes. They came straight from the manufacturers in America. This Mr. Porter trusted me. So I managed a shoe shop along with the dry goods. Those shoes used to sell quite well, and I made a lot of money. Later on, there were some more shoe shops in Kona, but in those days, I had the only shoe shop and dry goods, although there were quite a few grocery stores like a Pāke store which is very close, from here.

MK: What else did you sell, besides shoes?

UM: Fabrics; and clothes, like undershirts; and a lot of other things. I sold quite a lot of dry goods, although it was a grocery store. And hardware, which I lost money on.

MK: You lost money?

UM: Yes, I did. Well, when was it? I think it was the First World War--when the price of hardware went up. But when the price came way down, I lost quite a lot of money, and I almost went bankrupt. I went to Davies [Company] and said that I was going to go bankrupt. They asked me what had happened, so I told them about my situation. And they extended the date of payment for three months, since I still had the goods. I lost a lot of money because of the inflation, which caused no money flow, and the price cuts on the hardware. They told me that it would be all right for me to continue my business, so I did. And later on, when I made money, I paid my debts. But I lost all my money then, I didn't have any money.

MK: What year was it?

UM: Well, I wonder if it was before the war or not. I don't remember exactly what year it was. Could it be 25 years ago, or 30 years ago, when World War II ended? It was before that war. I came here

around 1920 and have been here for 60 years. So--1920--Do you remember when the Americans and the Germans had a war? Yes. Hardware went way up before the war, and it came way down after the war. It was called the European War [World War I], a war between Americans and Germans. I'm not sure if Japan was involved or not.

That was when I lost money. I almost went bankrupt, even though I had goods left. I couldn't pay my debts. For instance, the goods I had paid \$5 for went down to \$3. The price went down about 20 percent, so I lost lots of money.

MK: Did you do credit sales to customers?

UM: What?

MK: Credit. Could the customer have credit at your store?

UM: Yes. They could.

MK: Were they coffee farmers?

UM: Yes. They were all coffee farmers. They couldn't pay cash. The coffee price came down and they couldn't pay; besides, they bought goods when the prices were high. Lots of them went bankrupt. And almost all those who went bankrupt ran away. It was--the European war. . . .

MK: So when you started the store about 1920, did you buy the land then?

UM: No, I bought it later.

MK: When?

UM: I bought it after the Japanese-American War [World War II].

MK: Oh, you bought it a lot later. You started buying stocks before you started the store, is that right?

UM: Yes.

MK: Can you tell me about it?

UM: Well, I told you about the banker [who was married to Nora Greenwell]. I watched people when I went to the bank, and I found out that the foreigners didn't work. There was Greenwell, MacFarlane and a lot of haoles, though there aren't too many now. There was Wallace, too. They didn't do any work. I wondered how they got money to live on. I saw them bringing checks to the bank, and thought they were smart. I thought that I should start that myself, and I asked if I could buy stocks. They told me to try it, and I did, with the money I had. I first bought the stocks of Olaa Sugar Company, a sugar company which didn't give any dividends. So, in order to make money, I had to buy and sell the stocks at the

right times. When the sugar price went up, so did the stocks. And when the sugar price went down, so did the stocks. So I bought stocks when the sugar price was low and sold stocks when the sugar price was high.

It was fun, and I made quite a bit of money. And I wanted to know more about it, so I went to talk to a banker. He told me to buy the most secure stock, which would be a public utility. So I bought Inter-Island Steamship Company stocks. And I made a lot of money. After that, I decided to buy electric and telephone company stocks, but they weren't so much fun.

When I went to Maui--I had a friend there. The friend showed me the island and took me to a sugar mill in Puunene. I was very impressed with the big mill and thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to buy its stock. And also, I thought it was in a good location, Puunene. So I bought some stock in that company, and I still have stock in the company. It still is a good stock. I bought some others, but the most money I made was when I bought Ewa Sugar Company. I made a lot of money. Its dividends were pretty good.

So the reason I started buying stocks was that I saw the way the foreigners lived--those who didn't do any work, who had people working for them, who lived on the dividends of the stocks. I thought that was pretty good. I had to think of the time when I would get old. That's why I started buying stocks. I decided to support my senior years with stocks and interest on savings, which was also pretty good.

MK: You got a lease on a 75-acre coffee field property from Bishop Estate then, around 1920, didn't you?

UM: Yes.

MK: Why did you get a lease on that property?

UM: A man called Demerol (?) used to have a lease on this 75-acre property which was next to my store. My store was 6-½ acres. But this Mr. Demerol had gotten a mortgage on this 75-acre property from Farmers Loan. And in order to get this store, I had to remove the mortgage. So I paid off this mortgage when this Mr. Demerol got a warrant of seizure, and this land became mine.

I didn't mean to keep the coffee plantation then, but in order to save my store, I had to get this property, since the store couldn't get out of the mortgage. So I had to get the whole property. There was a 2000-some-odd-dollar debt on the store property itself. It didn't make any difference if the store property was attached or not. So I got the whole thing.

MK: Were there coffee trees [on the property]?

UM: Yes, there were. There were young trees and trees with coffee beans. They are down there, but they haven't been kept very well.

MK: You had a store, too, then. . . .

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: Who managed this coffee field, while you were managing the store?

UM: The people I hired did. I hired six or seven people to do the work.

MK: How much did you pay them?

UM: How much?

MK: Yes.

UM: I think it was a dollar a day then.

MK: Did they live with you?

UM: Yes, they had a house to live in.

MK: You mean their own house?

UM: No, my house. I had a camp below this house.

MK: Down below this store?

UM: Yes, right there. Mr. Takayama lives there now.

MK: What sort of work did those you'd hired do?

UM: They were all laborers. They'd been in plantations, so they were eager to work.

MK: Did they mostly pick coffee?

UM: They picked and processed coffee.

MK: Did they stay all year round? Did those Filipinos stay all year round?

UM: Yes. They worked all year round.

MK: About the same time, around 1925, you started roasting Kona coffee, didn't you?

UM: Mm [Yes].

MK: Can you tell me about the coffee?

UM: Well, the farmers were poor people. No matter how hard they worked, they couldn't set the price on their own product, but the buyers did. That was the weak part of being a farmer. That's why they couldn't get rich. It would have been good if they could set the

price--50 cents or \$3.30 per pound or whatever price they wanted--but the buyers always set the price. They would say they wouldn't buy for more than five cents or ten cents or whatever. And the farmers had to sell the coffee. I said, such a stupid system; everybody else sold his products setting his own price, so why couldn't the farmers! I set my price on my coffee which I'd made. And I started making roasted coffee.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

UM: So I had a lot of coffee fields, and I sold the coffee which was produced in my coffee field. I set the price, considering how much the original cost was, how much the parchment was, how much the process was. Anyway, 125 pounds makes one bag clean coffee. And when you roast it, it becomes 80 pounds roast, subtracting 20 from 100. That's how I figured the coffee price, considering how much I spent for this and that. So I set the price myself on the coffee I produced, because I couldn't let others set the price. It was no use to sell it for five cents if it cost me ten cents. That's foolish. So I insisted on setting the price for selling my own coffee. That's when I started selling roasted coffee.

MK: Did you sell the coffee which other people made?

UM: No, I didn't. [American] Factors had the control over them. They had to take theirs to Factors since they owed money. And when they sold their coffee to others, rather than Factors, it was called nukashi coffee [bootlegged coffee]. I didn't deal with their coffee, only mine. But when they brought it to me, I bought it, though I didn't ask them to sell to me.

MK: You had a store then, didn't you?

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: Did you roast the coffee which came from the people who owed you?

UM: When the farmers who owed money to me brought the coffee, I was free to do so, since they owed me the money, not others. I sold their coffee, since it was mine after processing it. I didn't expand my business too much. I roasted coffee and sent it to Maui and here in Kona. I sent it to Maui because I had a friend there.

MK: Which shop in Maui did you send it to?

UM: I can't remember the name, but it was in Kahului.

MK: Was it Onishi Shōkai?

UM: No, it was something "Store."

MK: Ikeda?

UM: No, it's not Ikeda, either. I did deal with Ikeda a little bit, though. I sent lau hala hats [to Ikeda Store]. The one I sent quite a bit of coffee to was a widow in Kahului. I can't remember the name. But I didn't ship to people I didn't know, since I was afraid I might get cheated. There is [a place called] Rice Mill in Hilo, Hawaii even now; that's where coffee was sold and bought. So I left it up to Rice Mill.

MK: You sold this Sun Mellow coffee until the war [World War II].

UM: Yes, I did, until the war started. I was interned. So [coffee roasting] was pau then.

MK: I think we are going to stop here, okay?

UM: Mm [Yes].

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-79-3-81 TR
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Usaku Morihara (UM)
March 3, 1981
Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii
BY: Michiko Kodama (MK)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by
Mako Mantzel.]

MK: Interview with Mr. Usaku Morihara at his home in Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii, on March 3, 1981. You got a lease on a 75-acre property from Bishop Estate in 1920, didn't you? Why did you get a lease on this 75-acre property?

UM: Because I was a farmer. I was going to farm this 75-acre property. My store was on this property. Mr. Demerol [?] borrowed money from Farmers Loan, giving this property as a security. And when Farmers Loan garnisheed Mr. Demerol, I paid the debt to Farmers Loan and got this property. Soon I planted some tomatoes on that property, on about 30 acres of it. And I made a little bit of money with tomatoes. Next, I planted pumpkin. So I did a little bit of farming. But because produce prices were low at the time I realized that farming is not a very good business, so I went into ranching, since it seemed a better business. But when the war-- between America and Japan [World War II]--started in 1940 [1941], I had to fold.

MK: Before you folded, how many cows did you have?

UM: There were about 30 cows.

MK: Who did you hire to take care of the cows?

UM: I did it myself. But when I was relocated to America, I had to fold, was pau.

MK: Did you sell the cows after they got big?

UM: You mean, did I sell the cows?

MK: Yes.

UM: Yes, I sold them to Portuguese who came to buy. When I was ranching, as a rancher I could slaughter and sell a cow every month. I did that.

MK: Were you still in the coffee business?

UM: Yes. I was in the coffee business, too.

MK: How many acres?

UM: Well, from down there to here, I wonder how many acres it was, probably about 20 acres. But the coffee business was not doing well then.

MK: Why?

UM: Because the coffee price was low. Though coffee was low, the cost of labor was high, so there wasn't much profit.

MK: How much was coffee going for then? I mean, the price of coffee.

UM: The price of coffee, the red coffee was \$1.25 per bag. Since I had to pay 75¢ [per bag] to the picker, it didn't pay.

MK: Did you hire coffee pickers?

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: Who did you hire?

UM: Mainly Filipinos. There were seven Filipinos working for me at the camp down there.

MK: What kind of camp was your camp?

UM: Oh, the camp. It was a small house.

MK: How small?

UM: It was a 12 feet by 24 feet house, where those Filipinos--all bachelors--lived.

MK: Did you give the house to those Filipinos for free?

UM: Yes, I did, since they were my workers.

MK: How did you find those Filipinos?

UM: There were lots of Filipinos then. Since the plantation work was cheap, lots of them came to Kona. They all wanted work. There were lots of them coming, so there were lots of workers then. Once you hired them, they stayed for quite a few years. When I needed

more workers, a Filipino who'd been working for me used to go to a plantation in Hilo and bring back his friends. There were so many Filipinos then that it was easy to hire them.

MK: Did they stay year round?

UM: Yes, they did.

MK: What did they do?

UM: Well, a long time ago, we didn't have poison, so they worked cutting grass with sickles. And there were various other jobs. There were seven, but not everybody always had a job. Some worked 10 to 15 days, since there wasn't work available throughout the year. There was work while coffee was in season, but not when all the coffee had been picked. They didn't work every day, since I didn't hire them every day, only when I needed them. They usually worked for two weeks. I had to let them work so they could afford their food, otherwise they had to borrow food from my store.

MK: Were you selling cherry coffee?

UM: Yes, I was selling cherry coffee. I also did parchment.

MK: How did you process cherry coffee into parchment?

UM: I had the mill down there where [the Honaunau] Post Office is located now. I bought the land from Bishop, and it had a coffee mill. I processed with that mill. I had a roaster, too.

MK: What was the name of the mill and the roaster?

UM: Sun Mellow Coffee.

MK: You told me it was started about 1925.

UM: Yes, that's right.

MK: How did it get started?

UM: Well, when the coffee price was low, as I told you before, the farmers couldn't set the price, but the buyers did. I was a producer, and I had to sell according to what the buyer decided. It was a disadvantage to farmers. As I always said, all producers set the price on what they produce, except farmers. They couldn't set the price, but the buyers did, although other people, in industries and so on, could set their own prices. So I always thought it was not fair. I thought I should set the price on the coffee I produced. That's why I started selling roasted coffee, setting my own price on it. I calculated how much the price should be, considering costs. Making red coffee, parchment, and roast. For instance, 400 pounds of red coffee becomes 100 pounds parchment. One-hundred-twenty-five pounds become 80 pounds after roasting. Then I would set the price and sell it. So I set the price myself. I used to buy red coffee, since I was short of it.

MK: Who did you buy from?

UM: From kanakas and people who ran coffee fields. Then, this place was full of coffee fields, although there aren't many left now. So I bought coffee from kanakas.

MK: Captain Cook and . . . (Interruption) Didn't those people who brought coffee to you sell to Captain Cook [Coffee Company] or AmFac [American Factors]?

UM: Those who didn't have any debts to Captain Cook could sell freely to whoever they wanted to. So I bought most of the coffee around here. People used to bring it from places like Honaunau.

MK: Did those people who were leasing land from Captain Cook or Amfac come to you, besides people from Honaunau?

UM: No, I couldn't buy from them, since they had mortgages from Captain Cook. They would have been garnisheed. They [Captain Cook Coffee Company] would have demanded some return if I had bought from them [Captain Cook coffee farmers]. Captain Cook would ask me to turn it over to them. So I couldn't buy from them.

MK: People brought coffee to your mill to clean?

UM: No, I did it.

MK: You mean at this mill?

UM: Yes. All I did was buy the red coffee after settling on the price. So my [buying] price was higher than other mills', since I roasted it myself. So everybody brought his coffee to me, asking me to buy it.

MK: How many cents higher was your price?

UM: What?

MK: How much higher was your Sun Mellow coffee, compared with other coffee mills, how many cents?

UM: It was 25 cents to 30 cents higher than others.

MK: Who worked at the Sun Mellow mill?

UM: Just myself.

MK: How about Hawaiian women, didn't you hire them?

UM: Who?

MK: Didn't you hire Hawaiian women?

UM: No, I didn't at Sun Mellow. I hired Filipinos for [picking] red coffee, but I didn't hire [anybody] for roasting. After the coffee was brought to the mill, I roasted it in the kiln. And I stored coffee there. That was all. I didn't do it very often anyway. I wonder how much I used to do--about 200 pounds?

MK: Where did you sell your coffee?

UM: Wherever--it was sold in Kona, too. Rice Mill in Hilo managed the sales.

MK: Coffee prices weren't too good between 1929 and about 1941, were they?

UM: Well, the coffee price went up and down, so I can't say, unless I look at the record.

MK: You told me the farmers and store owners had a lot of debts around 1930.

UM: Yes.

MK: There was a time that you tried to adjust all the debts. Can you explain what happened?

UM: You know that all coffee farmers were Japanese. And they borrowed money for a year, which was very unusual anywhere. In Japan, people borrow money for six months: once in Bon, another time at New Year's. But here, coffee farmers borrowed for a year. It's a rather stupid business, although I realized this only later. There were American Factors and Captain Cook, these two companies, which had furnished the farmers with money. And there were stores between them . . . it's difficult to explain. (Pause) This is Captain Cook, and they loan money to coffee farmers. And there was real estate buying and selling, too. And when a person had to buy some land, he borrowed money from either Factors or Captain Cook. And the Japanese managed stores.

For instance, this store loaned some money to farmers when coffee, red coffee, was 17 cents, which was pretty high. It went up to 20 cents when it was the highest. Anyway, it went down to 6- $\frac{1}{2}$ cents. So no matter how hard the farmers tried, they couldn't pay back the loan. The stores had debts to Factors, the farmers had debts to the stores. So in 19-- . . . I can't remember exactly what year it was. . . . I shouldn't tell you a lie. . . . I can't remember. (Pause)

MK: It is written 1935 and 1936, according to the record on this paper.

UM: Oh, is that right? That's probably right. There were about 1000 Japanese farmers in Kona who were borrowing money then. And those people started running away because of the depression; they were going to Hamakua. So I thought that Kona would be hit hard, so I had to do something about it. There was the Japanese hospital,

which had a debt with [American] Factors, and they were going to foreclose on the property. Since it would have been so inconvenient for everybody if that happened, I started collecting contributions to repay the debt, which was \$23,000 or so. I collected contributions from all over Hawaii. And the hospital's debt was paid.

This led to the idea of adjusting all the debts of the coffee farmers who were running away. I said it would be a good idea, but I thought it would be a difficult task, since it was a million-dollar debt. I wasn't sure how far we could get, although we were determined. So I said I would try it if everybody was really determined to cooperate. So we started negotiating with Factors. The coffee farmers were running away from Kona at that time and if they ran away it [Kona] would be pau. We went to Factors in Honolulu and negotiated with something like the board of directors of the company.

They asked me if we wouldn't be able to manage. They asked me what we wanted. I told them to reduce the amount of debts. They asked how much. I told them it had to all of the debts, so we wouldn't owe them anything. (Laughs) I also told them that no matter what, Japanese people would remember this and be loyal to them until death, so, if and when coffee prices got better, we would pay the debts then, although it would be without interest. We told them that. We told them that all the Japanese would keep their word, that they wouldn't just say, "All right, all right. Thank you," and call it pau just because they were out of debt. I told them the coffee business would be doomed otherwise, and there would be no Japanese in Kona, that it would be their loss as well as ours--farmers and stores, that they should let us be free of our debts. I told them they should forgive the debts and the stores, too, would forgive the debts totally. I told them the farmers would start working hard when everything started fresh. And those who'd run away would come back, since they liked Kona better than any other place such as plantations. They would surely return, I told them.

They told me that they couldn't give me an answer right away, that they had to have a meeting. I said that I understood. They told me they would let me know later, and that I should go home. And when I went home, they called me to say that they couldn't accept all the debts being forgiven, but we must pay at least two percent; although they wouldn't insist on repayment right away. They wanted us to agree that we would pay it later. So the negotiations succeeded, and we reached an agreement, that we would pay two percent with no date limit attached to it.

So the coffee business was saved. The Factors didn't lose much money either, although they, Factors and Captain Cook both, phased out their coffee divisions. Anyway, if it hadn't been for this, the coffee business [in Kona] would have been finished in about 1934 or 1935. But we kept it going. So because of the work I did, I was given this certificate of recognition by the University of Hawaii.

MK: What happened to the stores in Kona?

UM: (UM had difficulty with his hearing aid.)

MK: Can you hear me? (Pause) It's okay now? What happened to those people who had stores in Kona?

UM: So, they were saved too, and they kept their businesses, until the war [World War II].

MK: What effect did the war [World War II] have that they couldn't manage?

UM: You mean during the war? It was because people were taken away [relocated] to America during the war.

MK: How many people were taken?

UM: People were taken to America. I think it must have been about 40 people.

MK: What happened to you during the war?

UM: I was taken, too, although I resisted strongly, saying that I hadn't done anything wrong, that they didn't have any good reason to take me. They told me that, since I was pure Japanese, they had to take me away, as they were going to take all the Japanese away. So I gave up, although I didn't sign my name, which was what they had told me to do. I told them I hadn't done anything. They told me they were going to take me away because I was a Japanese, that they had to take all the Japanese away. I couldn't argue with that, since I was a Japanese, since the war was between America and Japan. So I agreed to go to America.

MK: Where in America did you go?

UM: First, I went to Kilauea, Hilo. They took me there. I was one of those people who belonged to the third group, which was a lot later. I wasn't taken in the first group. Teachers and people who worked at the consulate were taken first. I think I was in the third group.

MK: So where in America did you go [later]?

UM: I went to Santa Fe, Colorado, and New Mexico. I was transferred to three places.

MK: What sort of camps were they?

UM: The camps were quite comfortable. The food was good.

MK: What kind of food did you eat?

UM: Well--there was this Geneva Convention, which determined how spies and prisoners of war should be treated. So we were to be treated and fed just as well as American soldiers. It would be the same for American prisoners of war in Japan. Because of this convention, they couldn't make us work. Although they tried to make us work, we told them that we hadn't come there to work, we were only there because they had brought us there. Since there was a shortage of vegetables, they wanted us to grow vegetables, but we told them that we shouldn't work, that they should hire somebody else. So they hired Mexicans to do the work. We only did things like the cleaning of our camp, since that was our work.

MK: What was the life like?

UM: It was pretty good.

MK: What did you do every day?

UM: Nothing, we just hung around, just doing nothing. I did some work though.

MK: What kind of work?

UM: I did some cooking. I remained a cook for a long time.

MK: Did you get paid for that?

UM: Yes. I got \$19.

MK: Per month?

UM: Yes. Nineteen dollars.

MK: Did you hear from your wife or children, who you'd left here?

UM: Yes. I often got letters from them. There was no limit on that, although they checked them. They didn't say anything, unless there was something written about the army. The war was between the two countries; I had nothing to do with it. Mr. Porter of Davies wrote me a letter saying that although Japan and England were fighting, it had nothing to do with our relationship, and he wanted to keep our friendship.

MK: How were relations between people in the camp?

UM: They were good.

MK: Were there many people who came from different places like Hawaii?

UM: What?

MK: People, I mean, in the camp?

UM: Oh, in the camp. There were many people in the camp, Germans and other nationalities were in different [separate] housing, although they were in the same camp.

MK: You were there about three years, weren't you? Until 1945?

UM: Yes, I did.

MK: How did you feel during those three years?

UM: Nothing, really, since I'd given up everything. I didn't really worry, and I didn't care if they killed me. I'd given up my life. In a situation like that, I felt I wouldn't get out alive, since Japan was winning to the extent that America didn't know any better than the rest of the world, what to do about Japan. When Japan went to Singapore, the British troops fled, and Japan poured gasoline over the sea, then it fell under the fire. Americans were being defeated at first, but Japan lost in the end.

MK: So, when you came back to Kona, what had happened to your store?

UM: Well--that--if I had gone back to Japan, abandoning America, my fortune would have been confiscated by the American government. But as long as I stayed in America, they couldn't. My cows and so forth were taken by the villagers, but not by the government, you know.

MK: Yes, yes. How about the store?

UM: There were no goods in the store, since my wife couldn't manage the store, so . . .

MK: So you moved to this store [site from across the street] in 1945, I mean, after the war you moved to this store here. How did you start this store?

UM: I did what?

MK: You started this Morihara Store.

UM: A Pākē used to own this store [UM refers to original store], a Chinese. I bought it from him.

MK: You bought this before the war?

UM: Yes, long before the war. 1920, or 1919, since I was here on New Year's of 1920. I bought it in December, 1919, from this Pākē, Mr. Ah Wah. I've been here [Honaunau] since [that time].

MK: You'd managed this store before the war. And did you still manage coffee buying and selling after the war?

UM: Yes, I did. I am going to keep my hand in this coffee business until I die. (Laughs)

MK: You mean you are still in the coffee business?

UM: Yes. Yes.

MK: You were selling ice and fish, too, weren't you?

UM: Yes, I was.

MK: Are you still buying coffee?

UM: Yes, I am. As long as I am in Kona, where coffee is the major product, I must put my energy into this coffee. And in Hilo, sugar is the major product, so one must put his energy into sugar in order to succeed.

MK: Do you still own a coffee field?

UM: Yes.

MK: How many acres are you managing?

UM: Now? It must be nine acres.

MK: Do you hire some people?

UM: No, our family manages the nine acres; Motoki [son-in-law], Kazuo [son] and I, the three of us are managing it.

MK: How do you manage the coffee business differently from before?

UM: Coffee--you mean selling it?

MK: Yes, and also growing it.

UM: Selling coffee now is--since I'm old I don't do parchment, but I sell red cherry coffee. Kona farmers [cooperative] are the only ones who buy coffee and another one in Captain Cook. No one else buys it.

MK: You've been in this business, managing this store and coffee for a long time. How do you feel now, when you think back over your own life in Kona?

UM: Thinking back, I think I like it now, because prices have gone up. It's good that coffee prices have gone up, although expenses are too high, too. So people are going into nuts, rather than keeping coffee, since nuts cost less to produce. When you plant macadamia nut trees, you don't have so many weeds, so you don't have to weed so much. And when you're harvesting, all you have to do is to pick up the nuts, which can be done even by little kids. For picking, I pay five dollars per bag [picked].

But with coffee, you have to trim the trees once a year, unlike the nut trees, which you don't have to touch, once you plant them. And

when it comes to prices, coffee is--I wonder how much red coffee is now--around 40 cents, but it's 45 cents a pound for nuts. Picking don't cost as much as coffee; coffee costs \$15 per bag, but nuts cost \$5. This difference makes nuts a better business.

MK: What do you think of coffee's future?

UM: No future.

MK: Why?

UM: Well, coffee trees could be cared for, if there were people who were patient and hardworking. But nowadays, people who were born in Hawaii don't like jobs which make their hands and feet dirty, do they? That's why I don't think there's any future in coffee. Filipinos work with coffee now, but they are going back to the Philippines. I think the coffee business will be over soon. I realize the coffee business lasted as long as there were people who originally came from Japan, but there is hardly anybody who is in the coffee business among the people who were born here in Hawaii. Old people kept the coffee business, but the young ones are not interested.

MK: How do you feel about it?

UM: Me? Well, I think it's because salaries are high nowadays.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

UM: I feel that although I don't know what will happen in the future, I think coffee is over.

MK: You've been here quite a long time. When you think of your life in Kona, how do you feel about it?

UM: For a long time I've been lucky. In order to be successful, you have to have three things together, which are luck, sense and perseverance. Otherwise, you don't succeed. I've been here some 70 years since I came here in Hawaii, but I think I've been lucky. I am well off now, and I don't have to be a burden on my children. But not everybody can do what I can.

Young people in Hawaii nowadays may think that they have a good life with high salaries, but I believe they are going to come down. I don't believe in days like nowadays when a person gets \$20 to \$30 a day. When we first came to Hawaii, a Japanese, only got a dollar a day. But look at this now, three dollars and some cents per hour!

If this continues, America will be pau. It surely will be doomed. A sensible president should be elected, and he should change the system we have now, the salaries must be cut and devaluation will bring the prices down. So people who are now getting paid pretty high [salaries] would get about \$100 or so. Young people nowadays must realize that this is not going to last forever. It will surely come down somehow. So if someone who was smart were elected, he would do his job well.

MK: I sure hope so.

UM: If we don't do this, America will be pau. America already has so much debt, several billion dollars. . . .

MK: Today . . .

UM: Who is going to pay it back? Devaluation will be the answer.

MK: I hope so. I think we've done enough interviewing for today. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF KONA

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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